

#233: MARCH 2018 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

# THE INDYPENDENT

BAIL BOND BLUES

P6

KARL MARX'S WILD

DAYS

P14

QUEER EYE GETS

WOKE

P17

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AUTOMATION IS ON THEIR TRAIL.

PETER RUGH, P10



DAVID HOLLENBACH

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## COMMUNITY CALENDAR



**SUN MARCH 4**

1PM • FREE

**PARADE: ST. PAT'S FOR ALL**

The 19th St. Pat's for All parade, which celebrates the diversity of New York's Irish and Irish American communities.

*43rd St. & Skillman Ave.,  
Queens*

**MARCH 7–12**

Times vary • \$11 per screening

**FILM: NEW YORK FEMINIST FILM WEEK**

Cinema that interrogates cultural constructions of gender, sex, race and class with the aim of fostering critical dialogue among filmmakers and the general public. Visit [anthologyfilmarchives.org](http://anthologyfilmarchives.org) for showtimes.

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*32 2nd Ave., Mnhtn*

**THU MARCH 8**

All Day • FREE

**PROTEST: A DAY WITHOUT A WOMAN — WOMEN'S STRIKE**

On International Women's Day, women and their allies will act together for equity, justice and the human rights of women and all gender-oppressed people through a one-day demonstration of economic solidarity. Rally starts 5 p.m. in Washington Square Park. March begins at 6.

*Everywhere*

**FRI MARCH 9**

7PM–9PM • FREE

**BOOK LAUNCH: CARCERAL CAPITALISM**

Jackie Wang presents her new book of essays. Topics include the biopolitics of juvenile delinquency, predatory policing, the political economy of fees and fines, cybernetic governance, RoboCop and algorithmic policing.

**TOPOS BOOKSTORE CAFE**

*788 Woodward Ave.,  
Queens*

**THU MARCH 15**

7PM • FREE

**BOOK LAUNCH: FAMILY HISTORIES OF THE IRISH REVOLUTION**

Editor Sarah-Anne Buckley will give an overview of the book, including the stories of many unknown activists from the period of the Irish Revolution. Contributors Michael and Pat Dolan will share the tale of their aunt Eilish, who was wrongfully imprisoned at 15 years of age in order to save her father's life.

**BLUESTOCKINGS**

*172 Allen St.*

**SAT MARCH 17**

3:30–8PM • \$5–15 suggested donation

**PARTY: IRISH RESISTANCE SPECIAL**

Music. Beer. Food. Film. Explore the Emerald Isle's rich tradition of revolution this St. Paddy's while we raise funds for *The Indypendent* and the Marxist Education Project. The day kicks off with a 4 p.m. screening of *The Limerick Soviet*, which tells the story of when Limerick was under workers' control. Readings from the history of Irish resistance follow. The Celtic punky-and-western sounds of the Busy Busy and a jig-worthy set from deejay McLardner cap off the evening.

**THE BROOKLYN COMMONS**

*388 Atlantic Ave.*

**SAT MARCH 17**

5PM–Midnight • \$13–16, 21+

**FOOD: MIDNIGHT MARKET**

Dozens of vendors offering five-dollar food and drink

specials.

**GREENPOINT TERMINAL WAREHOUSE**

*73 West St., Bklyn*

**MON MARCH 19**

7:30PM • FREE

**HISTORY: COCKTAILS & CONSPIRACY: LEARNING TO RESIST**

On the 50th anniversary of the global uprisings of 1968, subMedia pays homage to the insurgent youth who helped kick things off a half-century ago by taking a look at some contemporary student-led movements that are still tearing things up around the world. Join them for drinks and a special screening.

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**MARCH 21–25**

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Participants read work inspired by the body. Cave Canem Foundation fellow t'ai freedom ford emcees. **CAVE CANEM**

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**MARCH 23–24**

FRI & SAT 8PM • \$16–20  
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**THE INDYPENDENT**

# MARCH

Artists and long-time collaborators Constance DeJong and Tony Oursler restage their performance of *Relatives* after more than 20 years. The history of the fictional McCloud family is traced through a succession of appearances in painting, photography, film television and video games.

**THE KITCHEN**  
512 W 19th St., Mnhtn

**MARCH 24–25**  
SAT & SUN 11AM–5PM • \$10  
**BOOK FAIR: FUNHOUSE**  
An interactive book fair at which guests can make their own books in collaboration with resident cartoonists and illustration artists.

**THE DRAWING CENTER**  
35 Wooster St., Mnhtn

**SAT MARCH 24**  
1PM • FREE  
**SCREENING: *¡PALANTE, SIEMPRE PALANTE!: THE YOUNG LORDS***  
This documentary surveys Puerto Rican history, the Young Lords' activities and philosophy, the torturous end of the organization and its inspiring legacy.

**CASITA MARIA CENTER FOR ARTS & EDUCATION**  
928 Simpson St., Bronx

**SUN MARCH 25**  
10AM–5:30PM • FREE  
**FOOD: FOOD TRUCK FESTIVAL**

NYC's best food trucks come together to serve up everything from lobster rolls to pizza. Profits benefit local public schools.

**GRAND BAZAAR NYC**

100 West 77th St., Mnhtn

**SUN MARCH 25**

Noon–6 PM • FREE  
**LIT: NYC FEMINIST ZINE FEST 2018**  
New York's biggest and most-feminist-themed zinefest — a jumble of magic, creativity and witchy energy.

**BARNARD COLLEGE**  
3009 Broadway, Mnhtn

**FRI MARCH 30**

3–5PM • \$30–35  
**TOUR: EXPLORING THE ABANDONED BUILDINGS & TUNNELS AT FORMER-NYU CAMPUS**

Join New York Adventure Club for an exclusive, behind-the-scenes exploration of Bronx Community College, a former campus of New York University from 1894 to 1973. Explore the hidden tunnels, secret balconies and abandoned rooms of one of the most impressive hidden gems in New York City.

**BRONX COMMUNITY COLLEGE**  
2155 University Ave.



EVENTPHOTOSNYC/Flickr

## WOMEN STRIKE

**BACK:** Join the international "Day Without a Woman" on March 8.

## TIOCDFADH ÁR

**LÁ:** Celebrate Ireland's revolutionary spirit with *The Indypendent* this St. Paddy's Day.

## REQUIRED

**READING:** Don't miss NYC Feminist Zine Fest 2018 this month at Barnard.

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2-19-18

# BRIEFING ROOM

## PRETTY STATIONS, SLOW TRAINS

New York's rusty subway system is getting what amounts to a fresh coat of paint. The MTA Board voted 10-3 on Feb. 22 in favor of a \$250 million dollar initiative to spruce up 33 subway stations with amenities like USB ports, art and new lighting fixtures. The spending is part of Gov. Andrew Cuomo's billion-dollar "Enhanced Station Initiative" to cosmetically upgrade New York's cash-strapped, delay-riddled subway, which runs primarily on a Depression-era signal system. None of the renovated stations will receive elevators, which disability advocates have called for.

## CITY SCHOOLS RESPOND TO GUN-VIOLENCE THREAT

In response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida on Feb. 14, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans for increased weapons scans in New York City public schools. De Blasio has previously disparaged weapons checks, saying they foster a prison environment in schools, but now believes scans are necessary to ensure student safety. Going forward, students will also practice sheltering in place in the event of an armed assault. The mayor — criticized as part of a

"tidal wave of new European socialists" by National Rifle Association chief Wayne Lapierre in a rambling diatribe last month — has also expressed support for nationwide school walkouts for gun control planned for March 14. Ten days later, a half-million people are reportedly expected to attend a "March For Our Lives" protest in Washington, D.C., organized by survivors of the Parkland shooting.

## WELCOME TO THE BRONX ZOO

Bronx prosecutors showed up to court drunk, had office sex with police officers and each other and left work for midday shopping excursions. These are just some of the allegations made by Crystal Rivera, a clerk for Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark, in a \$15 million notice of claim filed with the city's comptroller on Feb. 26. Rivera was placed on administrative leave in August, which she says was retribution for her romantic involvement with an NYPD Detective.

## RIKERS SHUTDOWN MAY SPEED UP

Not to be outdone by his downstate nemesis, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Gov. Cuomo is look-

ing to close Rikers Island ahead of schedule. De Blasio announced a 10-year plan to shutter the notorious jail last year. Criminal justice reform advocates welcomed the decision but called for the facility to close sooner. In February, the state's Commission of Correction issued a report noting that violence at Rikers was on the rise despite increased oversight from state and federal authorities. To close the prison ahead of de Blasio's timeline, the commission could issue a citation for failure to address violations. The city would have to bring the jail up to snuff or else the state could shut it down. Meanwhile, under de Blasio's plan, the first of nine detention centers on the island will be close this summer.

— INDYPENDENT STAFF

**OUT FRONT:**  
Protesters march outside City Hall in February 2016 to demand the closure of the Rikers Island jail complex. This summer the first of nine detention centers will be closed at Rikers.

ERIK MCGREGOR



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**CELEBRATING  
THE LIFE OF  
BILL  
KOEHNLEIN**

SATURDAY, MARCH 24  
1-4PM

SAINT MARK'S CHURCH IN-THE-BOWERY  
PARISH HALL  
131 EAST 10TH ST. AT SECOND AVE.

William (Bill) W. Koehlein, life-long peace and social justice activist, organizer and educator, died in Manhattan on Nov. 19 after a long, courageous struggle with colon cancer. He was 68.

A native New Yorker, Bill worked primarily as a freelance book editor and indexer. As a political actor, he was involved in projects and actions from the 1960s on that reached across the ideological spectrum of the left — anarchism, socialism, communism — while sharing a common goal: promoting revolutionary consciousness and practice.

Groups that he was active in included Students for a Democratic Society, War Resisters League, Liberation News Service, the anarchist Free Space/Alternate University, Brecht Forum/New York Marxist School, the Marxist Education Project, Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory and the Fourth Street Food Co-op in Manhattan. In the Fall of 2016, Bill was one of the first people to sign up for the Indy's adopt-a-box program where we asked our readers to volunteer in their neighborhoods to take care of the outdoor news boxes that we had begun to place around the city.

Humble, honest and compassionate, Bill lived a full life with integrity. He also touched hearts and minds with his encyclopedic knowledge, prodigious memory and wit. He also had a deep love of animals and was a defender of animal rights who vigorously promoted the health and ecological benefits of the vegan diet.

He is survived by his wife of 37 years, Marie-Claire Picher; his son, Lyle Koehlein, and daughter-in-law, Jessica Weiser; his mother, Joyce Johnson Koehlein; two sisters—Janice Van Horne and Margaret Giuliano; his brother, John Koehlein and numerous other relatives.

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

# BAIL BOND INDUSTRY TARGETED

BY LYDIA McMULLEN-LAIRD

**O**n a warm summer day in August 2015, Alexander, 28, found himself barefoot and lost on the streets of New York. Disoriented, he wandered into a private residence in Brooklyn and before he knew it, he was beaten up, arrested and in Rikers.

Veronika\*, Alexander's mother, said he had been struggling to stay on his medication for schizophrenia in the weeks before the incident. "I can't babysit him every minute," said Veronika, a single mother who works as a home health aide. "He's a grown man, I can't tell him to stay home."

Alexander's bail was set at \$25,000, an astronomical amount for Veronika, 64, who was making \$10 an hour and paying for Alexander's rent on top of her own. "If you're low income, you can't afford to bail someone out," she said.

Veronika contacted Nick Encalada-Malinowski at VOCAL-NY, a grassroots group that organizes low-income New Yorkers affected by HIV/AIDS, the drug war and mass incarceration. He helped her find a bail bond company, the only option for Veronika and many other low-income New Yorkers who are trying to get their loved ones out of jail. Veronika ended up using Marvin Morgan Bail Bonds, but it took her over five months to get Alexander out of jail, and another year to get her collateral back in full. "They make money off of people's misfortune, off their ignorance," she said.

The for-profit bail bond industry is notorious for taking advantage of people like Veronika in vulnerable positions and in some states, the industry is outlawed completely.

In New York, however, bail bond companies are still legal, and there are more than 100 companies in New York City alone including Marvin Morgan. In mid-February, in a move applauded by consumer advocates, the New York Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) filed a lawsuit against bail bond agent Marvin Morgan and several insurance agencies alleging numerous violations of the New York Consumer Protection Law. The lawsuit is the first of its kind against the bail bond industry in New York State.

"The for-profit bail bond industry has a history of exploiting economically disadvantaged consumers in their most desperate hours: after the arrest and incarceration of a loved one," said DCA Commissioner Lorelei Salas.

Veronika said when she showed up to pay the initial quoted amount of around \$4,000 in fees and collateral, Marvin Morgan tacked on over \$1,000 more and she had to borrow money from a friend to get Alexander out of jail.

Although Marvin Morgan paid Veronika back \$1,500, they refused to pay back the \$1,000 they added at the last minute, saying they had no record of this payment.

Even though Veronika submitted a letter to New York Attorney General and met with Marvin Morgan several more times regarding the outstanding payment, it took the company over a year to return her money.

**BAIL BONDS  
OF FIANZAS**

Veronika is not alone in her experience at Marvin Morgan. She eventually got her money back, but some were not as lucky. DCA is seeking more than \$57,500 in fines and restitution for 16 consumers and a restitution fund for the affected consumers who have not yet filed complaints with DCA. On average, the consumers cited in DCA's complaint are owed more than \$1,000.

"These stories are endless," said Ted Bajo, a lawyer who has worked on cases involving Marvin Morgan. He blames the Department of Financial Services for allowing bail bond companies to prey on vulnerable communities by failing to regulate the industry. "They don't issue any regulation, it's absurd," said Bajo.

Encalada-Malinowski said the lawsuit is a good start because it "puts companies on notice," but doesn't do enough to solve the overall issues. Marvin Morgan is only one company, and in a survey conducted by the Brooklyn Community Bail Fund, the overwhelming majority of participants had negative experience with bail bond companies and reported that they were overcharged, their collateral was not returned, the bail bond company unnecessarily delayed in securing the defendant's release or the bail bond company employed deceptive practices.

"Only two countries in the world allow commercial bail

**ROTTEN  
BUSINESS:** Outside  
the Marvin Morgan bail  
bond office at 77 Baxter  
St. A in Lower Manhattan.

ERIN SHERIDAN

**'THESE STORIES OF  
ABUSES ARE ENDLESS.'**

bond, the U.S. and the Philippines" said Encalada-Malinowski. VOCAL-NY is campaigning for the elimination of the industry through petitions to Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Attorney General Eric Schneiderman.

The courts also have a large influence and have the option to offer unsecured or partially secured bonds, which would eliminate the need for bail bond companies. Encalada-Malinowski said using unsecured bonds in place of commercial bonds would result in 12,000 fewer people entering Rikers per year, a 20 percent drop in annual admissions. This would align with Mayor Bill de Blasio's goal of decreasing the inmate population at Rikers to 5,000 in order to close the facility and relocate inmates to local facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx.

In the meantime VOCAL-NY is pushing for more regulation of the bail bond industry. "While we fight to eliminate this industry we must not lose sight of the immediate needs of directly impacted people," said Encalada-Malinowski.

\*Veronika and Alexander's names are both pseudonyms.

## UNIONS UNDER ATTACK

## FREE RIDERS

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

This spring, the Supreme Court is likely to rule that public-sector unions must represent workers who refuse to pay them anything. That could have intense consequences in New York State, where more than 70 percent of public-sector workers are union members.

The Court heard oral arguments Feb. 26 in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME Council 31*. Illinois state worker Mark Janus, backed by an array of far-right legal organizations, contends that having to pay a fee to American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Council 31 violates his free-speech rights because it forces him to give money to an organization he disagrees with.

Under current law, unions are required to represent all employees in a workplace, but those workers cannot be required to join the union. To balance that contradiction, the Supreme Court ruled in 1977, in *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education*, that workers could opt out of paying full dues, typically 1 or 2 percent of their annual salary, and instead pay an “agency fee” or “fair-share fee.” Those fees, typically 70 to 80 percent of full dues, cover the union’s bargaining and administrative costs, but exclude its political activities.

Janus’s lawyers argue that he shouldn’t have to pay anything. They claim all activity by public-sector unions is “political advocacy,” arguing that asking for a raise or smaller class sizes is lobbying the government for taxpayers’ money. William L. Messenger of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, representing Janus, called agency fees “effectively a form of protection money.”

Unions argue that agency fees are simple fairness, and that anti-union forces are using pretextual arguments to destroy workers’ bargaining power. If Mark Janus doesn’t want to pay the fees, United University Professions President Andrew Kowal says, “then if he’s going to be a responsible adult, he won’t take the benefits and protections of the union. What he wants is both ways. He wants to be a free rider.”

“The idea that public-sector unions, everything we do is political, is just flat-out untrue,” he continued. “When we’re defending someone who’s up on disciplinary charges or has a grievance, those are not political issues.”

The case “did not grow from an organic, grassroots challenge to

union representation,” the Economic Policy Institute wrote in a report released Feb. 21. It has been backed by a small group of foundations whose funders include the Koch brothers and the DeVos family. They finance numerous litigation and policy-advocacy groups that try to impede union activity, particularly in the public sector.

The Court is almost certain to rule against the unions. Two years ago, it deadlocked 4-4 on virtually identical arguments in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association*, after Justice Antonin Scalia’s death eliminated the fifth vote to overturn *Abood*. Scalia’s replacement, Neal Gorsuch, argued as a lower-court judge that a truck driver was justifiably fired for abandoning a disabled trailer after he drove off rather than freeze to death waiting for help to come.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, the usual swing vote between the Court’s liberal and far-right blocs, was openly antagonistic to the union arguments. He called agency fees “compelled justification and compelled subsidization of a private party.”

## LEARNING FROM WISCONSIN

If the Supreme Court outlaws fair-share fees, will unions’ fate be more like those in Wisconsin — where membership declined by one-third after Gov. Scott Walker’s 2011 laws choking public-sector collective bargaining and the 2015 law banning the union shop — or Iowa?

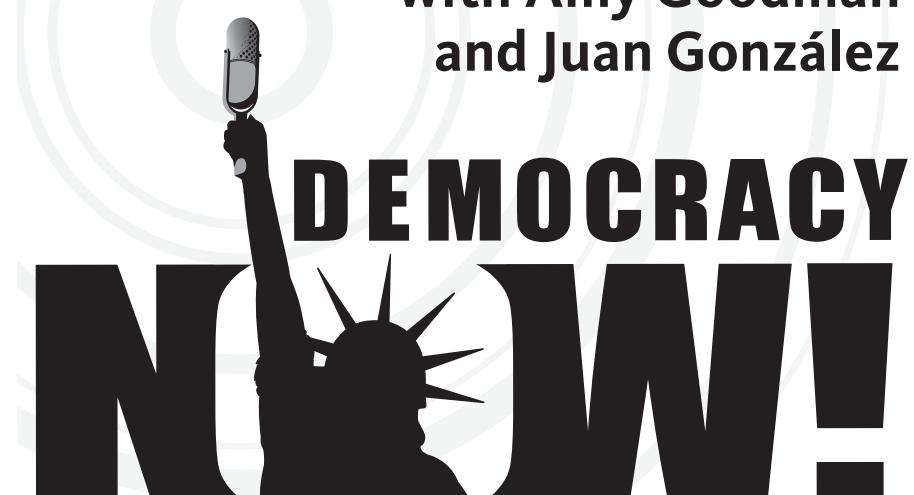
In Iowa, state law bans fair-share fees, and only 29 percent of the workers represented by AFSCME Iowa Council 61 pay to support the union. Yet it’s also a defensive-organizing success story. Last year, after Gov. Terry Branstad signed a law requiring public-sector unions to win recertification periodically — with a majority of all workers, not just the ones who voted — the unions won in 93 percent of bargaining units, with barely 2 percent of workers voting no. They realized they had to organize intensely after the law was enacted, Iowa State Education Association President Tammy Wawro told *LaborPress* last November.

New York State has the highest proportion of union labor in the nation, with about 24 percent of all workers union members, 72 percent in the public sector. “The New York City trade-union movement in my view is now the epicenter of defense

Continued on page 9

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# FROM PROLETARIAT TO PRECARIAT

## NONSTANDARD WORKERS HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT THEIR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR STATUS

BY ERIC LAURSEN

**W**hat does it mean to be unemployed? The answer depends on what kind of worker you are.

"Full-time workers see unemployment as a shock," not just a cutoff in income but a collapse of civility and status, says Andrew Stettner of the Century Foundation, who's spent years studying the changing workforce and the future of work. "But freelancers see it as endemic" — part of the cycle they struggle with all the time.

"You don't know what I do — there's never any 'civility' in my work!" Stettner recalls one freelancer saying about his interaction with employers. Another once told him, "In January there's never any work, so I don't leave my house, because then I don't spend any money."

The proletariat, in other words, is being replaced by the precariat.

Stettner was speaking in January at the National Academy of Social Insurance's (NASI's) public policy conference on "Nonstandard Work and Social Insurance." Nonstandard work, from home health care aides to Uber gigs to fast-food service, all the way up the skills ladder to legal research and software coding, is redefining employment in the latest stage of the neoliberal economy. Actual jobs, with health and other benefits and some degree of security, are becoming scarce in hypercompetitive industries where employers pursue every gambit to keep workers off the payroll.

Most Americans still are employed in "traditional" jobs, but this is changing fast, especially in the years since the Great Recession began and especially in industries as diverse as manufacturing, leisure and even public administration. In 2005, 10.1 percent of the employed workforce were in alternative arrangements — temporary help agency workers, independent contractors, on-call workers — and by 2015 that figure had climbed to 15.8 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In raw numbers, that was equal to the entire growth in employment for that 10-year period. Without nonstandard work, in other words, there would have been little or no expansion in employment during the economic recovery.

Hard numbers are no easy to come by for nonstandard workers in every industry, but home health care aides, the original gig economy workers, are one of the fastest growing occupations in the country. About 149,000 worked in New York City as of last July, a figure that grew by 12 percent in just one year. Some 4 million workers in New York City are estimated to do freelance work, although they may have more traditional employment as well.

The problem is, the social safety net hasn't evolved to keep up. Programs like workers' compensation, Unemployment Insurance (UI), Social Security and Disability Insurance, not to mention employer-based pension plans, were designed for a time when lifetime employment with dependably rising wages was typical. Today, more and more workers are falling through the cracks. And yet, nonstandard workers need the safety net more than traditionally employed people: less than one in 10 contributed to a retirement account and only about 13 percent of primarily self-employed people purchased health insurance through Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) marketplaces, according to a Treasury Department analysis.

The NASI conference had two objectives: to define the nonstandard workforce and the issues it faces; and, assuming the old pattern of lifetime employment isn't going to come back, explore what can be done to turn temporary

and contract work into something more than a way to survive from day to day.

The first was the easy part. According to an assortment of scholars, economists, entrepreneurs and worker advocates who spoke at the conference, misclassification of contract workers has become an enormous problem. More than one-third of individuals who should be full-time employees are wrongly identified as contract workers in states like Texas and North Carolina. Wage theft is common. On-the-job injuries are far more frequent among nonstandard workers (independent crews who service cell-phone towers are especially at-risk). Home health care aides do back-breaking work for low pay (median annual wage in 2016: \$22,600, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics), often off the books.

"Corporations have managed to distance themselves from accountability for workers," said Rebecca Smith, senior counsel at the National Employment Law Project. The social safety net hasn't changed to fill the gap, "so we have to reorganize the safety net," says Carmen Rojas, CEO of The Workers Lab, which sponsors projects to build worker power.

Some experiments are happening at the local level: Silicon Valley Rising, for example, has unionized some 5,000 workers like Facebook shuttle drivers and is pushing for Google's deal to expand in San Jose to include a plan for more affordable housing. The city of Stockton, California last month launched a demonstration project providing a Universal Basic Income (UBI) of \$500 to some low-income families and tracking what they do with it.

For any safety net program to provide nonstandard workers with the degree of security they need, however, "it's got to be a regular feature of work, no matter what," said David John, senior strategic policy advisor at AARP. At the same time, said Rojas, the solution mustn't place a greater burden on workers, many of whom have little no savings.

Several participants at the NASI conference argued for extending the social insurance model, in which all workers contribute to fund a program that provides benefits to all and which includes Social Security, Medicare and Disability Insurance. The good news is that there was no shortage of ideas for doing so.

Two ideas heard repeatedly were to liberalize the eligibility requirements for UI, which has been cut drastically in recent years and is now available only to some part-time workers, and require employers that use nonstandard workers to pay a proportional share of their Social Security and Medicare contributions. That could be facilitated by creating a new category of "independent worker," in between full-time employees and independent contractors, who can receive some benefits and Social Security contributions without requiring full employee status.

For some categories of workers, it may also make sense for consumers to foot some of the bill. In New York State, the Black Car Fund provides workers' comp to black car and limousine drivers through a 2.5 percent surcharge added to the passenger's fare.

A "job seeker's allowance" for independent contractors and people who have exhausted their UI payments would help nonstandard workers who can't find paying work, giving them extra leeway to pay for job training and reach potential employers. State-level self-employment assistance programs, which allow individuals to work full-

time setting up their own businesses while still receiving UI, could be adopted by other states or turned into a national program.

A less ambitious goal that could prove extremely valuable for nonstandard workers is simply to enforce laws regulating worker classification more strictly, making sure they aren't abused to save employers from having to pay benefits.

The not-so-unspoken goal behind many of these ideas, however, is to once again make employers and contracting organizations contribute to the safety net for their workers. The expansion of the nonstandard workforce is good for businesses that want to lower labor costs and offload as much of their benefits costs onto workers as possible. "Companies don't view it as their responsibility to provide benefits anymore," said Aparna Mather, a resident scholar at the Economic Policy Institute. Creating an "independent worker" category would require employers to again make a portion of Social Security and Medicare contributions for more of their workers. Expect pushback.

"How do you build solutions that don't burden poor people to solve the problems of the economy?" Rojas asked. Worker self-organizing is critical, several conference speakers emphasized. Home care workers have had some success improving their pay and benefits by organizing their own agencies and through campaigns organized by the National Domestic Workers Alliance, for example.

New York has been a focal point for some important organizing efforts, bolstered by a series of new labor laws passed under the de Blasio administration. Last year the Freelancers Union helped push the Freelance Isn't Free Act through the New York City Council; the law requires a written contract for any work valued at \$800 or more and establishes the right to be paid in full by the date specified

## THE GOAL IS TO ONCE AGAIN MAKE EMPLOYERS AND CONTRACTING ORGANIZATIONS CONTRIBUTE TO THE SAFETY NET FOR THEIR WORKERS

or within 30 days after work is completed. In December, Fast Food Justice was organized as a non-profit to bring together the city's 50,000-some fast-food workers in response to a new law that gives them the option of deducting contributions from their paychecks to fund nonprofits that provide services and advocate for members — although not to negotiate wages for them.

Before getting too deeply into the details, however, "we need to ask ourselves what our solidarity is for," Rojas suggested. "I don't care about an extra \$200 a month — I want my child to go to decent schools."

The problem, in other words, is not money: it's the resources, opportunities and benefits available to non-standard workers and their households. In a precarious economy that vacuums up much of their earnings just to pay for housing, health care and transportation, reforming the safety net to make sure it encompasses people who don't make a living in traditional ways is just as important as cash.



MARGUERITE DABAJE

**AIN MAKE  
ACTING  
BUTE TO THE  
WORKERS.**

## UNIONS

*Continued from Page 7*

for working people across this whole country. If the Koch brothers can beat us in New York City, then they're going to beat us everywhere," Transport Workers Union President John Samuels said at a Feb. 24 rally in Foley Square. "We must hold the line here, and I think we will."

"We are organizing, organizing, organizing, and it's working," Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, which represents 30,000 City University of New York faculty and staff, told *The Indypendent*. Wisconsin's unions were taken by surprise in 2011, she says, but with this case, "there's been much more time to prepare." The PSC has been asking current members to sign "recommitment cards," asking fee-payers to join and having "one-on-one, member-to-member conversations for months and months," she says.

New York's large public-sector unions, including the 125,000-member District Council 37 and the United Federation of Teachers, have also embarked on internal-organizing campaigns. "We're trying to talk to every member we have," says Mary E. Sullivan, executive vice president of the 300,000-member Civil Service Employees Association. "We are talking to the people who are fee-payers now to ask them to join us and stay with the union."

Several union leaders say that most workers who pay agency fees aren't union opponents dragooned into it, but people who just assumed they were already members. At CUNY, says Barbara Bowen, many staff, particularly adjunct professors, thought they were automatically members because fees were deducted from their paychecks and they went to union rallies.

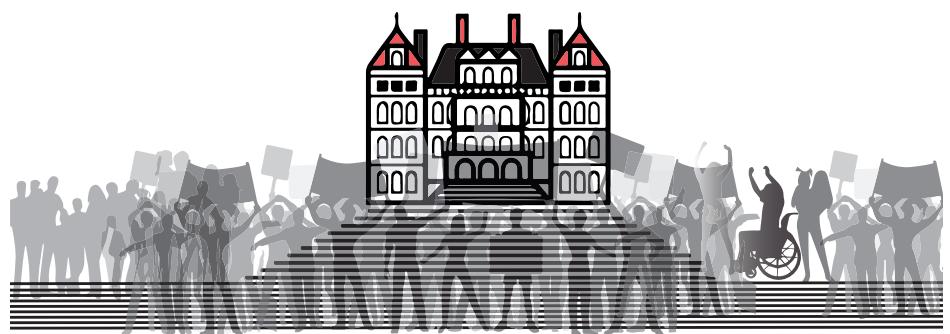
About 30 percent of the workers DC 37 represents weren't formally enrolled in the union, says treasurer Maf Misbah Uddin, "but because we were alerted on this, the last few years we have been going member to member, agency to agency, department to department."

He sees the specter of Janus as a signal unions must change. "Labor leaders have to go to the membership, in the community, in the locality," he says. If people haven't joined, "it is only because we, the leaders, have not been able to convince them, explain to them and show them the difference between the union member and the nonunion member."

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# CARJACKED

## UBER IS LEADING THE RACE TO THE BOTTOM. UP NEXT, DRIVERLESS VEHICLES

BY PETER RUGH

Morning rush hour was in full swing, yet the deafening bang that came from Douglas Schifter's vehicle cut through the noisy clamor of New Yorkers hustling to make it to work on time. Inside a rented Nissan sedan, the 61-year-old professional driver put the barrel end of a shotgun to his head and pulled the trigger at the eastern gate of City Hall.

It was a shot heard round the city, where drivers are increasingly feeling the pinch brought on by an influx of new ride-for-hire vehicles. With the taxi industry in the midst of transforming into an app-driven business, Schifter's suicide was a call to respect the human behind the wheel.

"I cannot survive any longer with working 120 hours [a week]!" Schifter, who had over 40 years of driving experience, wrote in a Feb. 5 Facebook post shortly before leaving this world. "I am not a Slave and I refuse to be one."

Unable to make ends meet, despite living out of his car five days a week so as to always be on call, Schifter's suicide also speaks to the wider dynamics at play between technology and capitalism and comes on the cusp of another wave of change set to transform transportation as we know it: the driverless car.

"It is too late for me so who is next?" Schifter asked.

He blamed Uber, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and two New York City mayors — Michael Bloomberg and Bill de Blasio — for destroying his livelihood. The three politicians played a decisive role in the deregulation of the taxi and livery industry in New York, making it harder for drivers like Schifter to get by. Cuomo and Bloomberg pushed more hacks onto the streets, while de Blasio has so far buckled under pressure from Uber and its competitors. He received more than half a million dollars in donations from the yellow cab companies during his first run for mayor, but once in office refused to place restrictions on app-based car services after Uber mounted a public campaign against regulation.

"He was trying to play catch up on a down-slide of the industry and I know he's not alone," Schifter's brother, George, told *The Independent*. "That's been his cause, to try and get people — the officials — to go ahead and understand the ramifications of their decision to flood the market [with ride-for-hire vehicles], to allow it to happen, in a state that has a tremendous capability of dealing out legislation, taxation and regulation, of making laws that can and do force the right thing to be done. In this case, they dropped the ball."

### BLOOMBERG'S HIT & RUN

Under the direction of then-Mayor Bloomberg, the city began issuing 18,000 new taxi licenses in 2013. The introduction of the green-colored fleet of cabs was ostensibly done to provide greater taxi access to New Yorkers in the city's outer boroughs, where rides for people of color were often hard to come by. But it certainly also fit under the rubric of Bloomberg's free-market ideology. "I am going to fucking destroy your industry," he reportedly quipped to Evgeny "Gene" Friedman, known once as the Taxi King for the numerous cabs under his

domain. By allowing more cabs on the road, Bloomberg helped do just that. Uber and its doppelgangers finished the job.

There were 107,000 ride-for-hire vehicles on the city's streets in 2017, more than a two-fold increase from when Bloomberg left office, while the number of traditional taxis has remained constant at about 14,000. Since the 1979 repeal of the Haas Act, which had prohibited the leasing of cabs, the taxi industry has increasingly relied on contract labor. Formerly designated as employees, most drivers now have to pay medallion-holding companies for the use of their vehicles, as well as shoulder the cost of gas and tolls. Uber has taken this business model and put it in hyperdrive, going as far as to force its drivers to pay sales and workers compensation taxes.

Gov. Cuomo has come to Uber's defense on more than one occasion, describing the company as "one of these great inventions, start-ups, of this new economy." Last year, he signed legislation that granted Uber and other ride-share services license to operate statewide under the authority of the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Meanwhile, the value of taxi medallions has plummeted. In 2013, a medallion cost \$1 million. Today, they are commonly auctioned for less than \$200,000. Medallion holders who borrowed heavily to purchase their licenses now find themselves holding worthless documents, undercut by Uber and its competitors and unable to capitalize on their investment.

Hedge funds, seeing an opportunity to sweep up the medallions at rock bottom prices, have been purchasing them in droves. In September, bidders with MGPE, Inc., a front company for an undisclosed out-of-state hedge fund, purchased 46 medallions at just \$186,000 each. The medallions had belonged to Gene Friedman, the Taxi King himself, until Citibank foreclosed.

### HANDS OFF THE WHEEL

Should Uber or Lyft, utilizing predatory pricing models and flush with venture capital cash, monopolize the taxi market, what's to stop these multi-billion dollar companies from doing away with drivers all together? Nothing it seems, but their technological ability to do so — a roadblock that Uber, along with Alphabet subsidiary Google and the big automakers are diligently working to lift.

Proponents of driverless cars argue that they will be safer, particularly since 94 percent of all traffic accidents are caused by human error. They also



**OFF-DUTY:** Tariq, an NYC cabdriver, takes a break from behind the wheel.

contend that they will reduce time and fuel usage, given that driverless cars will be able to travel closer together at constant speeds and without a lot of the fuel-guzzling hardware of traditional cars. "A million fewer people are going to die a year," Uber's former CEO, Travis Kalanick, told *Business Insider* in 2016, before he was forced to resign last year amid allegations he created a toxic work environment at the company and video of him screaming at an Uber driver went viral. "Traffic in all cities will be gone. Significantly reduced pollution and trillions of hours will be given back to people — quality of life goes way up."

Uber also expects driverless cars to bump up its profit margins.

While safety claims remain to be tested, it is possible that by doing away with typical inhibitors to vehicular travel like fatigue and intoxication, automated cars might in fact lead to an increase in emissions. It's easy to imagine someone, unable to find a parking spot in Manhattan, sending their Tesla looping around the block while they sip a few cocktails in Soho, then hopping back on board for the long ride back to Connecticut, which, hey, isn't such a slog now that the automated driving system does all the work.

Then there is the question of technological control. Technologists have raised concerns that Google, a company that traffics in information and makes its money selling ads, has hopped into the driverless car space. What happens should your Waymo vehicle decide to take an unexpected route home, forcing you to stop at the store of a favored advertiser?

These dilemmas aside, what will happen to the humans? Specifically, the half-million taxi and rideshare drivers in the United States, not to mention the nation's 3 million truck drivers? It's a quandary borne of what Peter Frase, author of *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*, describes as the "automation anxiety endemic to industrial capitalism."

From the cotton mills in 19th century England to the assembly lines in 1970s Detroit, "as long as there has been industrial capitalism, there has been that drive to economize on labor, to increase profits, to make more with less by needing fewer workers," Frase told *The Indy*. "The question always, whether we're talking about the Luddites or the automation of cars, is who benefits? Uber has driverless cars, who benefits from that? Is it the people who used to be taxi drivers or is it just the CEO and stockholders of Uber? It's a political question and it's a class question."

The Trump administration is supportive of the new laws, though the Senate bill has been held up in the wider body due to concerns the exemptions it contains — lifting airbag requirements, for instance — are too broad. Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) has also raised alarm that the Senate's bill does little to protect consumer privacy or guard against the potential for cyber attacks.

Yet technology companies and auto manufacturers don't anticipate these impediments will remain in place for long.

Ford Motors has plans to roll out a line of fully automated cars by 2021. Not to be outdone, General Motors filed a petition in January with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) through its subsidiary Cruise to grant it a waiver to federal safety standards in order to deploy 2,500 driverless cars as part of a rideshare program it expects to launch in San Francisco next year. The vehicles lack brake pedals or steering wheels, similar to cars already tested by Google's Waymo at lower speeds.

NHTSA is reviewing General Motors' application. If current driverless car legislation is approved on Capitol Hill, it will allow the agency to issue 100,000 such exemptions per automaker per year.

For its part, NHTSA doesn't seem too keen on developing safety standards. Under the direction of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, it issued new guidelines for automated cars last year. The guidelines are voluntary. Echoing the mostly-bi-partisan enthusiasm for the vehicles at the Detroit Auto Show earlier this year, Chao said her goal is to lift "barriers to the safe integration" driverless automobiles.

A former Secretary of Labor under George W. Bush, Chao had little to offer in the way of consolation for drivers whose jobs are at risk. "In the long run, new technologies will create different types of jobs, but the transition period can be very difficult for dislocated workers," she said, before inviting people to a career fair staged by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation at the auto show.

### WHERE ARE THE BRAKES?

It's not that driverless cars mean an immediate pink slip for America's hacks, bus drivers and truckers. There will still be an intermediary period where a human will need to be on hand. Driving will simply require a different set of skills. Yet it is easy to imagine a day when an Uber arrives and the driver's seat is empty.

"Obviously, there is going to be a transition period," said Larry Willis, president of the AFL-CIO's 32-unit Transportation Trades Department. "But they're not doing this because it is a 'gee-that's-really-neat' concept. They're doing this to save money, cut costs and build their profits. That's what companies do, but that's why God created labor unions."

Willis wants any driverless car legislation Congress passes to exclude commercial vehicles. But in the long term, he knows he's facing a challenge. Ultimately he says something similar to a federal trade adjustment assistance program that offers training and financial assistance to workers who have lost jobs due to cheap imports is called for — only one that is effective. In the past, he says, particularly after NAFTA, "trying to prove your job was impacted by trade was difficult, the benefits that workers received were limited and it just wasn't really set up in a way to make sure there were jobs for those who were displaced really through no fault of their own."

The call to save jobs, however, is a "defensive battle and it's a losing battle," says Peter Frase. "It's pitting one set of workers against everyone else who can see this new technology coming along and will wonder, 'Why are these people being such jerks and resisting it?'

He compares the situation facing drivers to that of fast food workers who have fought through the national Fight for \$15 campaign to raise wages. Critics, including numer-

### WHEN DRIVING A CAB PAID GOOD MONEY

I drove a yellow cab for a year in the 1980s.

To work the night shift, you had to go into the garage for a "shapeup" at 1 or 2 in the afternoon and wait around until a cab became available, usually about two hours unless you bribed the dispatcher more than the usual \$1.

We did 12-hour shifts, from jerking our way through rush-hour traffic to trying to out-hustle other cabs for the few fares out after midnight. We worked under the specter of being robbed, cruising in the wee hours with \$200 in cash in your pocket and legally required to take strangers anywhere they wanted to go. But as a single man, I could make enough money to cover my rent, child support and rehearsal space for my band after working two or three nights a week.

We had a weak union, but we were still guaranteed a percentage of the meter revenue — 41 percent for beginners, eventually going up to 50 percent — plus tips and all of the 50-cent night surcharges after the first \$4. A union official explained that this was the best system: If you were paid by the hour, there was not much incentive to work, but if you leased the cab, you'd lose money on a bad enough day.

Leasing was exactly what the industry was changing to: Drivers rented the cabs per shift and also had to pay for gas. If you had a spectacular day, like three round trips to Kennedy Airport in

### HOW EUROPE TOOK ON UBER AND WON

In the wake of Douglas Schifter's suicide, the debt-strangled livery driver who took his life on Feb. 5, the time has come to make sense of the endless tragedy of American drivers' exploitation.

The note left by Schifter on his Facebook page explains the reasons for his gesture and offers a lesson in democratic literacy: the situation is not going to change by itself, transformative action must be taken. "I know I am doing all I can," reads Schifter's note. "The rest is up to you. Wake up and resist!"

Despite the defeatist rhetoric of the U.S. media, the exploitative car-sharing industry can be beaten. Let's take a look at how this has been accomplished elsewhere in the world.

Several months before the European Court of Justice ruled that Uber is in fact a transport company subject to regulation and licensing by E.U. countries, authorities in London ruled in September 2017 that Uber is not a "fit and proper" operator and announced that its license would not be renewed. A British employment tribunal followed that ruling by mandating Uber consider its drivers "workers" and not "independent contractors," thus allowing them access to the minimum wage and holiday pay.

Indeed, it is on the very semantics of exploitation that digital capitalism is waging its class struggle. "I refuse to be a Slave," declared Douglas Schifter in his last note. In a decade when Silicon Valley's billionaires rewrite the English vocabulary to rebrand exploitation and disenfranchise workers, time is ripe to call out worker abuse, and to fight back.

And I now work in journalism, another industry where technology and the ruthless hands of the market have decimated workers' incomes and job security.

On June 20, 2015, France experienced a wave of Uber-inspired protests that featured overturned cars and tires set on fire from Marseille to Paris. U.S. pop singer Courtney Love was caught up in the unrest and tweeted her frustration, claiming to feel "safer in Bagdad." On

— STEVEN WISHNIA

Jan. 27, 2016, a Paris court ordered Uber to pay 1.2 million euros (\$1.5 million) to a taxi union and in July of last year the company was found guilty by French court of starting an "illegal" car service.

Riots rang through the streets of Rome, in Feb. 2017, where a coalition of cab driver organizations held protests for seven days. The uproar in Italy's capital saw cherry bombs and clashes with police. A country-wide ban of all Uber services (including Uber Black, Lux, SUV, X, XL, Select and Van) was issued two months later. The Italian court decision, later thwarted by the company's appeal, ruled that Uber constituted unfair competition among transportation services.

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— FEDERICO DI PASQUA

### MOVING RIGHT ALONG

Current laws governing automobile safety were written assuming humans are driving our cars and trucks, but perhaps not for long. New federal legislation intended to govern the deployment of driverless cars was approved with bipartisan support by the House of Representatives last fall. A similar measure received the approval of the Senate's Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. Both pieces of legislation would grant the Department of Transportation the authority to preempt a patchwork of state laws governing automated vehicles and allow automakers to circumvent certain safety requirements like brake pedals.

Continued on page 13

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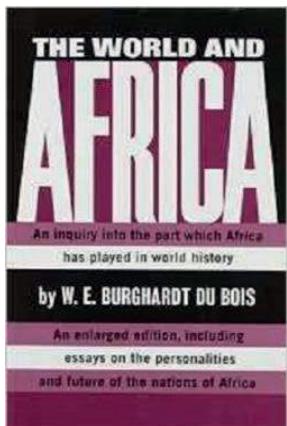
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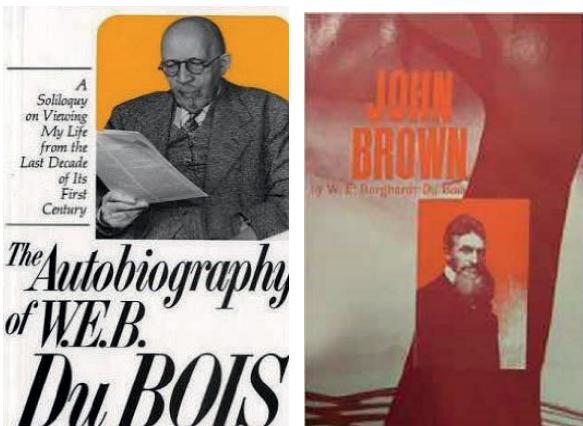
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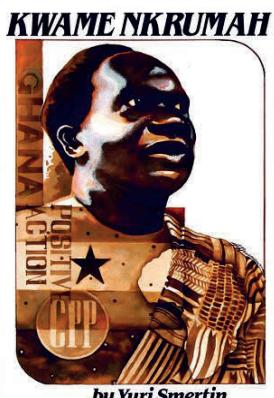
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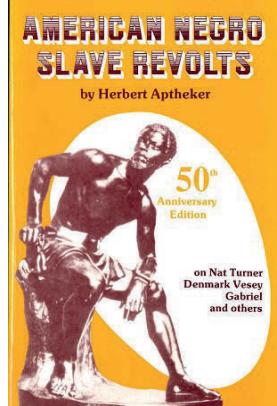
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## OP-ED

# WHAT OUR DRIVERS NEED



BY BHAI RAVI DESAI

In the front seat of the yellow, black and green cars that help one million of us get around every day — on holidays, in snow storms — there is a workforce in trouble.

There have been three suicides by drivers in our city in as many months. Foreclosures, bankruptcies and eviction notices are on the rise. Drivers are facing a vicious race to the bottom, brought on not by technology, but by a political economy that favors Wall Street over workers. It's the front line of the gig economy. And drivers need armor in the fight of their lives.

A longtime black car driver, Douglas Schifter, killed himself in front of City Hall on February 6. He posted a note on Facebook shortly before his death, saying he faced financial ruin because New York City streets were flooded with too many vehicles. Douglas knew the culprit: Wall Street darling Uber and its cohorts.

There are now at least 65,000 Uber-affiliated vehicles in New York City. For every one fare waiting, these companies want 10 drivers in line. Nine drivers go home empty, but the company increases its chances ten-fold of beating its competitors. Unlike taxis and green cabs that are capped, these companies can get away with it.

"There seems to be a strong bias by the mayor and governor in favor of Uber," Schifter wrote, "a company that is a known liar, cheat and thief."

In 2016, Uber and Lyft together had more lobbyists than Amazon, Microsoft, and Wal-Mart combined. Uber and Lyft, aka Uber-lite, use their political might to fight off any regulations that would slow down their unfettered expansion. That includes minimum wage and hour laws, paid sick leave and employee rights for drivers.

It doesn't have to be this way.

City Hall can cap the number for-hire-vehicles flooding our streets. Through attrition we can reach a number that allows drivers to earn a living wage and doesn't choke our roads.

The gig economy titans don't just hurt drivers in other sectors — their own drivers are the first to suffer from their greed. Uber drivers often make so little that many sleep in their cars. We need

a minimum fare rate across all sectors based on the regulated yellow and green cab meter.

Our movement organized for 16 long years to win rates that brought drivers out of poverty. When first in town, Uber and company slashed fares to out-compete cabs. Today, Uber is charging passengers more while paying drivers at a lower rate. Regulating fares across for-hire vehicle sectors can lay an economic floor for drivers the way the minimum wage does across the economy. Rates need to go up immediately.

Drivers now work so many hours just to stay afloat that they can't take care of medical needs. Others simply can't afford health-care coverage. Schifter in his post talked about homelessness and starvation. This was after working 100-hour weeks. It's unconscionable. This can't be what we are as a society.

We need a health and benefit fund for drivers, so they can get the care they need. Our union won such a fund for yellow cab drivers a few years ago, but it was fought by fleet owners who sued. The mayor could have enacted it while the lawsuit continued but he failed us. Drivers deserve both health care and living wages. The City Council must legislate as such.

While drivers are on the brink of despair, the city continues to see them as an easy source of revenue through ticketing. In December, Danilo Castillo, a livery driver in the Bronx killed himself after writing a suicide note on the back of a summons from the Taxi and Limousine Commission.

We need to limit the outrageous fines imposed on drivers. Fines should be commensurate with earnings. The city can't continue to provide Uber an unfair advantage while also grabbing for driver incomes.

Finally, we have to ramp up the fight against the new world corporate order of turning full-time jobs into poverty gigs, stripped of the most basic protections. This isn't our inevitable future. It's a call to fix a broken economy.

Bhairavi Desai is the executive director of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance.

# BARGAINING WITH ROBOTS

BY NATHAN SCHNEIDER

**A** new article faith has lately been added to Silicon Valley's reigning doctrine, alongside the abomination of neckties and the eminence of Burning Man: the idea that everybody should receive a "universal basic income," a substantial, regular stipend for being alive. Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk have championed it, and even Barack Obama, while a sitting president, suggested that such payouts may soon be necessary.

The cause for this, we're told, is automation. Robots and artificial intelligence are advancing to such a degree that millions of jobs will soon disappear, never to return. The ancient link between employment and income will need to be severed. Yet the most remarkable thing about this onrush of interest is not that it is happening — serious, powerful people talking about unconditional cash for all! — but that we don't have universal basic income already.

Smart people a long time ago assumed this kind of thing would soon become a given, long before now. The colonial-era philosopher-preacher Jonathan Edwards, for one, saw technology-enabled leisure on the 18th-century's horizon. "There will be so many contrivances and inventions to facilitate and expedite their necessary secular business," he imagined for the denizens of the near future, "that they will have more time for more noble exercise." Economist John Maynard Keynes, even as the Great Depression set in, expected that due to "technological unemployment" his grandchildren's generation would enjoy 15-hour workweeks.

We got the technological wonders they expected, and more — just not the time or the freedom from want it would depend on.

In the 1960s and early '70s, basic-income-style proposals seemed obvious enough that they found advocates like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Milton Friedman, John Kenneth Galbraith and Margaret Mead, Buckminster Fuller and Friedrich Hayek, George McGovern and Richard Nixon. Governments conducted detailed trials, which showed promise. Then came globalization and some economic slowdowns. The masters of the universe began feeling less generous.

They also realized they could get their technological

advances on the cheap. Beginning in the early '70s, U.S. worker productivity continued to increase, but wages went flat. Private-sector unions began their nose-dive into a now-imminent extinction, so most wage-workers lacked the power to claim their share of the value they were creating. The obvious conversation about basic income stopped. Rather than becoming obsolete, jobs just stopped spreading the new wealth they generate. And as tech's nouveaux riches realize their complicity, the basic-income talk has started up again. This time, as before, it sounds like a foregone conclusion.

"There is a pretty good chance we end up with a universal basic income, or something like that, due to automation," Elon Musk told CNBC in 2016. "I am not sure what else one would do." Says the former secretary of labor Robert Reich, "I keep running into executives of high-tech companies who tell me a universal basic income is inevitable, eventually."

Inevitability, for a technologist, is false humility. If the future were merely inevitable, why bother becoming a technologist? No — the future, and particularly its economic arrangements, are shaped by people, by choices, and by power.

Universal basic income is a good idea, just as it was 50 years ago. It's a simple, non-utopian reform that won't solve any fundamental problems but will ease the hurt they cause considerably while sustaining consumer demand for the goods and services that businesses produce. A few hundred dollars a month or more could lift millions out of poverty, without the paternalism of welfare programs. It would liberate people to seek education or start a business. Workers would gain more leverage to walk away from bad jobs. We'll never really know what more control over time will enable us to do, but I'd love to find out.

It would be expensive, however, and it's hard to imagine such an outlay from a government that can't even fix healthcare to the extent that every other wealthy country has. Maybe it's so easy for the tech elite to talk about basic income precisely because they know it is not soon to happen.



GARY MARTIN

This is going to require a fight. The common story is that the robots are the threat to workers, but robots are just robots. It's not robots that need to be bargained with, or that can be. The real obstruction will come from those, as in times past, who will find it too tempting to keep on accumulating the benefits of automated efficiency for themselves. It will take a fight to ensure those benefits are really shared — not through philanthropic handouts, but through a recognition that prosperity is a collective inheritance.

Basic income advocate Peter Barnes, for instance, suggests deriving the funds from dividends on the use of such shared assets as clean air, the electromagnetic spectrum, and financial markets. This is like the model Alaska already uses to distribute about \$1,000 from natural-resource wealth to each resident every year. The trouble is, too many industries are too used to regarding

## TECHNOLOGY DELIVERS WONDERS, BUT NOT THE FREEDOM FROM WANT YOU WOULD EXPECT.

our shared assets as theirs to exploit. It is their shareholders we will be bargaining with. Sometimes, these shareholders are ourselves through pension funds or our 401k retirement plans.

Only people who are too busy to notice their own choices, or too mired in the way of things, can think that anything is inevitable. Basic income certainly isn't. But should we someday win it, it's tantalizing to imagine what other schemes the free time might enable us to deem possible.

## DRIVERLESS CARS

Continued from page 11

ous fast food franchises, warned them to pipe down with their demands, otherwise they would be replaced by iPads at cash registers. Low and behold, touch pad technology is slowly being integrated into the service industry. Borrowing from the Danish sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen, Frase calls this the "decommodification of labor."

"We live in a society where our labor and

therefore our selves are a commodity," Frase says. "Our access to a livelihood is dependent on our ability to sell our labor." When our labor is de-commodified by technology, demands for positive rights such as universal healthcare and the more recent concept of a universal basic income (UBI) become all the more crucial. Our right to exist and persist shouldn't be contingent on our ability to work, especially as automation increasingly displaces our need to do so. Hence, rather than rallying to preserve jobs on the endangered species lists, Frase asserts the labor

movement must push for strengthening the welfare state.

Fraser cautions that UBI, the idea that everyone deserves a minimum stipend on which to live, has its limits, pointing out that under capitalism a large chunk of whatever is dolled out would likely go toward lining the pockets of landlords and others who control the necessities of life. But having less of a concern for where the next paycheck will arrive from could free up more time for political organizing, fighting for another system — that "Star Trek" future that is waiting for us.

In the interim, says the AFL-CIO's Larry Willis, "We've looked at UBI. We've looked at what other nations have done and what we've done in this country to deal with shifts in the economy, but I think we should be focused on trying to create a good job market and good job opportunities. People want to work. They want to earn a living. That is engrained in the ethos of this country."



THE ORCHARD

## WHEN MARX WAS YOUNG & DASHING

*The Young Karl Marx*  
DIRECTED BY RAOUL PECK, 118 MIN.  
THE ORCHARD, 2018

By Michael Hirsch

Raoul Peck's *The Young Karl Marx* is the best buddy movie since George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* in 1969. It's also among the most important films in decades, bringing to a mass audience not just the revolutionary ideas of Marx and his friend and collaborator Frederick Engels in the early days of modern capitalism, but an approach to politics and history that still has no peer. Charting the world as he saw it, Marx wrote: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole." Has anything changed?

The film begins in 1844, with the story of two young men challenging not only leading thinkers of the academy but radicals abstracted from real struggles. It ends with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 when neither of the authors was yet 30 years old.

Heavily influenced by the German philosophers Georg W.F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach, the duo created not just a philosophy but a politics. They took from Hegel the idea of the dialectic as a clash of opposites leading to a synthesis and applied it to institutions and movements as a framework for action through understanding power and powerlessness. From Feuerbach, they adopted how reality was materially based, though reliant on human will and sensuous activity, not as abstractions as Feuerbach had it.

"Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it," Marx wrote in his concluding *Thesis on Feuerbach*. Unlike the era's utopian socialists, Marx and Engels based their politics on a reading of economic relations in which the state and politics do not determine the economy. Rather it is the relations of production that determine the state and its politics.

Engels, in his magisterial *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in 1845 while working in Manchester as a clerk for his father's cotton-spinning factory, saw firsthand the contradictions inherent in what was then the world's most industrialized nation. A national economy dependent on trade could go into crisis with the first bump of a business downturn, with half its population even

in good times "unpropertied, absolutely poor people, a class which lives from hand to mouth, which multiplies rapidly."

Poverty in this perverted system was treated as criminal, with Engels noting that paupers were consigned to either prison or penal colonies, offering the keepers of the state "the satisfaction of having converted people without work into people without morals." Who could blame them, Engels wrote, "if the men have recourse to robbery or burglary, the women to theft and prostitution." If a revolution came, he believed, it would be based on material interest, not — or not just — on principles. It would be a social upheaval, not simply a political reaction.

The film's treatment of factory worker Mary Burns, Engels' longtime lover and part of the group that helped him investigate conditions among Manchester's poor, is a pleasant surprise. While it posits Burns as a dissident worker at his father's factory — something there's no known evidence she was — it presents her as a self-directed militant at a time when women in the workforce were invisible to scholars and journalists. It also counters the usual treatment of Burns, who historians often either ignore or mention in a risqué manner, given that she and Engels were never married.

Peck, who also directed the *I Am Not Your Negro* documentary profiling James Baldwin, has said he did not want to create a period piece. "The goal was to concentrate on recreating an atmosphere," he told a press conference. "The feverish reality of an era — to better immerse the audience in 1840s Europe: the harshness of English factories, the extreme destitution and filth of Manchester streets (comparable to a shanty town), the gilded warmth of Parisian interiors (luxurious residences, libraries, etc.) and the energy of youth eager to change the world, all combined to illustrate the early years of gaping inequalities."

Does he pull it off? Yes and no. The film's craft is nonpareil and it vividly portrays an aggrieved class and a parasitic caste of exploiters. But is it possible to understand Marxism and the deep contribution Marx and Engels made to economic thinking and revolutionary politics from a two-hour movie? Too little is elaborated on to make the film a solid pedagogical tool.

"From the outset, I decided to make a film that would speak to the widest audience, without distorting historical

truth," Peck insists. He keeps his word: There is no distortion, although there is one factual flub. The film says that Marx, assigned to write the Communist League's manifesto in the fall of 1847 to make its ideas compact and plain for the insurgent movements emerging throughout Europe, missed his January 1848 deadline because he was busy with assignments for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Marx actually didn't begin writing for the *Tribune* until 1851. With help from Engels, the *Communist Manifesto* was delivered in February 1848; the rest is history.

Also, did the film really need Bob Dylan's nasal "Like a Rolling Stone" to accompany the closing credits? The tune isn't about the working class, let alone fighting back. Kicky musically, but a strange choice.

Absent these caveats, the film is a must-see.

*The Young Karl Marx* is currently playing in limited release.

**RADICAL TRINITY:**  
(from left to right) Vicky Krieps,  
August Diehl, Stefan Konarske  
in *The Young Karl Marx*.



### HOW I MADE YOUNG KARL MARX

*If I had tried to do this movie by reading and studying all the contributors to and interpreters of Marx, I would have been lost. So we chose to go directly to Marx as a human being, as a young man in a world of inequality. If you read the correspondence between Karl and Jenny [Marx], Marx and Engels, these are young people writing to each other. In those letters there are political*

*discussions, there's theory. But they speak about their friends, their lives, their work. They are funny, they're ironic, they're passionate. That was the fuel for the film. We wrote 80 percent of the screenplay based on the correspondence, that's why they're so human.*

— RAOUL PECK, Interviewed by vulture.com.

## MUSIC

# AUSTRALIA'S #METOO PUNKS

*How To Socialize & Make Friends*  
CAMP COPE  
RUN FOR COVER RECORDS,  
2018

By Brady O'Callahan

We're in the middle of a cultural reckoning and this Melbourne-based band has its finger on the pulse. Though they'd likely be the first to tell you they're just as in tune with it as any woman you know, Camp Cope writes bold, unapologetic rock anthems for people tired of male, cis-hetero bullies.

*How To Socialize & Make Friends*, the band's second full-length album, begins with a blistering track, "The Opener," which holds up a mirror to the men in the music industry. The reflection presented isn't pretty. Guitarist and singer Georgia "Maq" MacDonald spends the entire song espousing lines no doubt heard by every woman who's ever tried to make it, or even to just exist, in the music world from men attempting to diminish women's accomplishments, offer unsolicited advice or who exude a general, unearned confidence.

Sexism has been an unwelcome yet inherent part of rock scenes for decades. Camp Cope tackles it head on, demanding reflection, awareness, and change. "The Opener" calls to mind Corin Tucker's (of Sleater-Kinney) *Hey Soundguy* zine, in which Tucker photographed and documented each macho, condescending sound technician on tour. She encountered the same cast of characters Camp Cope is dealing with 20 years later. The three women of Camp Cope are sick of it, and they're ready to lend their voices to fighting for things to get better.

During a recent appearance at the Falls Festival in Australia, the band took the festival to task for the lack of women performers on the bill. Maq prefaced "The Opener" by proclaiming, "It's not about filling a quota ... It's about the type of world we want to see in music. We want an equal and inclusive and diverse music community because that's what it is. It's just not represented properly on festival lineups or on big shows."

The band has also been vocal about ending sexual assault — especially with all the stories of coercion and abuse of power that have come to light in rock



NAOMI BEVERIDGE

music scenes of late. Maq contemplates a harrowing personal experience in "The Face of God."

"I had to leave," she sings, "because I had to say 'no' and 'stop' more than once — way too many times. You just kept trying to change my mind." Her vocal performance fluctuating between tender and tortured, Maq wonders what she did wrong. As she comes to grips with her experience, she hears from others that her abuser doesn't "seem like that kind of guy."

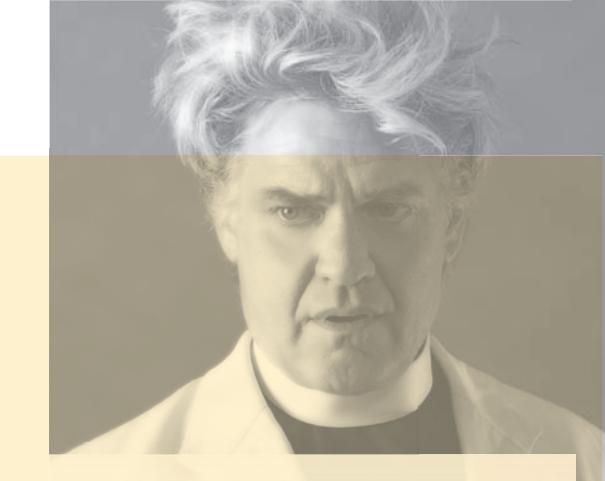
Much like fellow Australian Courtney Barnett, Maq writes with a conversational and personal tone. As tracks like "The Omen" highlight, she's able to balance hyper-specific personal experiences — "I've been driving way too much, I'm too lazy to ride my bike" — with high-minded musings — "To need a promise of heaven to do good deeds, it seems inherently wrong" — within the span of a few lines. She pushes her voice to gentle and coarse extremes like Hop Along's Frances Quinlan, using it as a tool for emotional evocation.

The vocals aren't tied down by the music. Rather, all the individual parts navigate around each other, never indebted to the other, just complementary. Camp Cope is a shining example of a band's members' individual contributions acting in the service of the music rather than merely as a supporting act for one shining star.

*How to Socialize & Make Friends* is filled with vulnerable and empowering moments throughout, whether they deal with finding strength in the face of grief and loss or feeling dejected but determined in a world set on remaining inhospitable. More than any other lyric, this one from "The Face of God" stayed with me: "I bet you didn't even think about what you did." This is the type of album that can alter a person's worldview, and I hope it reaches everyone who can stand to hear it, especially my fellow men out there.

## FEM CRUSADERS: Camp Cope

# REVEREND BILLY'S TRUMP HELP HOTLINE



JON QUILTY

*Dear Reverend Billy,*  
*I see these deportations on the news. I knew Trump's election would be bad, I didn't know this bad. Is there anything we can do now or do we have to wait till he is up for re-election in 3 years?*

— SUSAN, Bushwick

Dear Susan,  
Before fathers were pulled out of front doors with screaming children hugging their legs, New Yorkers sensed that something basic was wrong, something shifted in our city. How is it that older immigrants — people whose ancestors came from Italy in the 1920s, Ireland in the 1840s — are putting newer immigrants in chains? Is the chaos of Trump's sick mind stronger than the green woman in New York Harbor who welcomes the world's "tired and poor masses yearning to breathe free?"

Susan, too much of what we do is a form of shopping. The path to fascism is paved with a thousand conveniences. The monoculture of chain stores and luxury condos and little screens disconnects us from the reality around us. We are left in the wrong dream, too passive for the emergency. Are we desperate for a breakthrough to straightforward seriousness? America turns its lonely eyes to you, Nina Simone.

Yes, there is a place to start over. The NYC New Sanctuary Coalition saves lives every day by standing up to Immigration Customs Enforcement, Trump's terrorist police. The courage we showed a year ago when we stormed Terminal 4 at John F. Kennedy International Airport is manifest in everyday kindness. Accompany these Americans to the courts, to the hospitals. Take our neighbors into our homes. No, we can't wait three years — or three days.

There is a wave of revulsion building against this President. At the heart of real activism there is no screen, no algorithm, no data. We are standing in the door between the abductor and our neighbors.

• • •

*Dear Reverend,*  
*I'm really happy to see #MeToo take out all these sexual bullies, but sometimes I wonder if more innocent behaviors like flirting are going to be stigmatized. To be safe, should I confine my love life to my dating apps or should I keep the faith in human-to-human interactions?*

— HANK, Harlem

Hank,  
The #MeToo moment is crucial. As for whether you should confine your love life to dating apps, well, it's easy to reduce a revolution to cheap choices. Dating apps can be as sexist as anything else, Hank, you can't run away from change into the camouflage of pixels.

Most women — and men — have their favorite sort of flirt. It's better to slow down and wait for the unexpected message. The other person might have subtly-stated rules of the game, or may want to move fast. The idea that #MeToo has made flirting dangerous is a French hoax!

A woman's guidelines don't usually favor pressuring and repetitive tactics, not just because it might foreshadow some form of violence, but because it's boring. For some of us males, being sensitive is like facing a mysterious frontier. Now it's #MeToo time and we have to start over and learn how to do it.

Don't resist it with snark or beer-drinking in sports bars. Let flirting be your noble science. Figure it out. You know it's working when she has become the flirt — check out the phenomena of the balanced conversation! Who knows, it might raise to the surface the things within you that are interesting, complex, intriguing.

One more thing: Learn to apologize. No emails, no shortcuts. Look her in the eye and relax into taking responsibility. The best flirting is honest. Flirt-a-lujah!

**REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. GOT A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL REV BILLY@INDYPENDENT.ORG AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.**

# THE DIY GAMING REVOLUTION

BY CHRIS RASA

**T**here have always been numerous DIY communities in video gaming. Dedicated players edit and modify an existing game's content to their liking, fan groups create alternate language versions of forgotten gems to make them accessible to new players and ambitious creators make their own games from scratch without the aid of a major budget. These independently-made games have become more and more prominent in the 2010s, carving out a niche among the most expensive releases of the big publishers. Today's players can now find retro-styled, low-budget games made by individuals or small teams on digital distribution platforms sharing space with the industry's equivalent of Hollywood blockbusters like *Call of Duty* or *Assassin's Creed*.

The rise of indie games has been accompanied by progressively more accessible resources for creating them. Consumer-level game development tools have been around for a long time, but today people have more refined and affordable (or in some cases free) options to work with, along with new communities devoted to helping one get started. And with these new resources, diverse new voices are able to tell stories in games that no major publisher would touch. These games are made by small groups of people (or in some cases one person) with a focus on integrating the experiences portrayed in them with how the player controls the game in order to create something genuinely unique.

The following three games are worth a look both for their subject matter as well as the ingenious little ways in which their creators deliver an experience.

## 12HRS

[kivabay.itch.io/12hrs](http://kivabay.itch.io/12hrs)

*12hrs* puts the player in the role of a homeless person trying to survive the night. It was created by Kiva Bay and Caelyn Sandel and is based on Bay's own experience with homelessness. The game was designed in TWINE, an open source tool used primarily to create interactive fiction. (You can learn more about this program at [twinery.org](http://twinery.org)). *12hrs* plays like a choose-your-own adventure game, but Bay's writing keeps things tense. She is careful to add a potential humiliating or dangerous consequence to almost every action the player can take. Bay's blunt, matter-of-fact writing quickly establishes a sense of isolation and hesitation while playing.

This and the knowledge that several of the scenarios in the game are taken directly from Bay's personal experiences, makes for a sobering time. Where *12hrs* really shines though is in the way it uses TWINE's simple interface to its advantage. A major part of the game involves begging for spare change, which can later be spent on food. The inspired part is how one spends the money. Mainstream games that involve transactions of any kind are often designed to streamline the process as much as possible, but in *12hrs* each time the player wishes to make a purchase, the game does not tell them how much money they have. Instead, it lists how many of each coin is in the player's possession, and it is up to the player to manually sort and count up how much money they want to hand an increasingly impatient clerk. This moment encapsulates everything the game has to say about being homeless: being judged for wanting to participate in society in the most basic way, while having one's every move simultaneously chastised, ignored and dismissed with a glance.



...I guess they felt that's all they could do... to just keep being happy where they could...

## ALL OUR ASIAS

[sean-han-tani.itch.io/aoa](http://sean-han-tani.itch.io/aoa)

This is a short adventure by teacher and composer Sean Han Tani. Intentionally low-tech looking, the game's graphics resemble something one would encounter on gaming platforms from the mid-90s. One can particularly see the influence of the cult games *Shin Megami Tensei* and *LSD: Dream Simulator* on *All Our Asias'* look. The game was built with the Unity development platform, which has been very popular among indie developers for creating games with 3D environments. It follows Yuito, a Japanese-American man who learns that his estranged father is dying. Yuito unfortunately does not arrive in time to speak to him, but he is soon informed of an experimental technology that will allow him to briefly enter and experience some of his father's memories. Hoping to learn more about him, Yuito readily enters his father's mind.

The rest of the game follows Yuito on an abstract trek for closure, which doesn't come easily. Yuito is continually frustrated by the lack of a single clue or insight to answer his many questions. He is presented with memory after fragmented memory of Asian experiences that have nothing in common with his own, forcing him to question both his and his father's roles in their own community. The game is short and laser-focused on one character's personal growth in a way that complements the lo-fi aesthetic.

## BEING

[iasminomarata.com/being](http://iasminomarata.com/being)

*Being* was released last year by Iasmin Omar Ata, a Palestinian-American cartoonist and illustrator. It was made in RPG Maker, a role-playing game development kit that's become more refined and accessible over the years, but has been around in various forms since 1988. Ata puts it to good work here, creating a variety of environments and moods that reflect a spectrum of lived Palestinian experiences.

Players explore the game's small world in the role of a time traveler sent to various epochs and places to procure historical artifacts. Arriving in a place unknown to them, they find only the smallest evidence of the people who once lived there amid several surreal traumatic experiences. Ata's use of color and sound gives the game an appropriately oppressive feel from start to finish, and this is only helped by the various literary quotes the player can read throughout the game regarding the occupation of Palestine. All of this gives *Being* an uncommon slow burn anger. Despite this, the game ends on a powerful and hopeful note.

## TIME WARP:

In Iasmin Omar Ata's *Being*, players are transported through history finding traces of the people and the trauma that came before them.

IASMIN OMAR ATA

## TELEVISION

# QUEERING THE DOMINANT CULTURE

*Queer Eye*  
NETFLIX, 2018

By Peter Rugh

**E**arly on in this Netflix reality reboot we're told that the first *Queer Eye* was about tolerance. This new series is about acceptance.

Not that the early aughts original, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, wasn't a bit of a television coup in its day. For the those unfamiliar with its premise, in each episode a team of trendy experts known as the Fab Five run to the rescue of a living, breathing fashion emergency. By the end credits their straight subject is looking good and feeling confident. Shallow as it was, the show suggested that straight America might actually have something to learn from some of the people it has marginalized.

However, as critics pointed out at the time, making straight people handsome and self-assured shouldn't be a prerequisite for their tolerance. The revamp bypasses this sticking point by dropping the "for the Straight Guy" bit of the title, though with one notable exception, the new cast continue to focus their primping and grooming on the straight men among us.

Nonetheless, it is fascinating to watch how the new *Queer Eye* uses its makeover premise to confront cultural divides, going further than the original ever did — literally. This *Queer Eye* is set in Atlanta and surrounding rural and suburban Georgia, whereas the original was based primarily in Manhattan.

In episode three, "Dega Don't," the Fab Five are pulled over by a police squad car on a back country road. Karamo Brown, the show's



NETFLIX

culture expert, who is Black, is visibly shaken. We eventually discover that the officer who stopped the group is playing a prank on them. He is a buddy of the Fab Five's makeover target, Cory.

Later, Brown has a heart to heart with Cory, also a cop, not to mention a Trump supporter. Brown tells him he didn't think the prank was very funny, given the threat of violence people of color (and he might have added queer people) face from law enforcement in this country. The conversation winds up being rather circular, but maybe that is to be expected. Two strangers from entirely different backgrounds aren't going to magically see eye to eye, no matter how good one makes the other look.

Another notable example of *Queer Eye* confronting cultural divisions comes while the show's design expert, Bobby Berk, helps a conservative Christian makeover target, Bobby Camp, set up a garden in his backyard. While the pair plant kale together, Berk tells Camp of the shame and isolation he felt as a gay youth raised in an evangelical church setting. Evidently, Camp takes note.

"Growing up the way we did," Camp tells the Fab Five at the end of the episode, "homosexuals were not accepted. And they still aren't in a lot of church environments. But in the Camp family, they are. In our hearts they are."

One cultural schism the show mostly papers over, however, is class.

Bobby Camp has six children and is trying to hold down two jobs. His wife also works full time. Is it any wonder then that he doesn't have a lot of time to spend perfecting his image? The Fab Five make concessions for his case, taking him shopping at Target, for instance, instead of one of the more high-end shops they typically drag their makeoverees to. But it is hard to imagine Camp returning to get

the \$100 haircut he received during the taping of the episode.

This is a flaw that runs through the original *Queer Eye* and is present in much of the self-help industry: the idea that anyone can look and feel good, all it takes is for you to go out and spend a few thousand dollars on yourself.

That equation leaves much of the general population out of the mix. Inversely, numerous examples of people who wear the most stylish of clothes, live in the glossiest of homes and also happen to be deeply miserable abound. The show pays lip service to the idea that how you look isn't as important as what's inside, emphasizing that the makeovers the Fab Five perform are about building self-confidence. But where the show is strongest is when it explores another crucial element of happiness: community.

When Anthony, "the straightest gay guy in Atlanta" comes out to his stepmother in episode four, the stakes couldn't be higher. It isn't just about Anthony being comfortable in his own skin, though the Fab Five help with that. Anthony risks losing the connection he has to the person he loves most in order to show her who he truly is. His friends and his boyfriend are close by in case his coming out goes south, providing a kind of communal bedrock for Anthony's courageous honesty.

The Fab Five themselves are out and open and have an infectious amount of fun turning around the lives they enter into, but Anthony's story illustrates how far we still have to go as a culture in 2018. After acceptance comes solidarity. Next, liberation.

**HEART TO HEART:** Not many makeover shows address police brutality. This one does. Here Karamo Brown (right) offers Officer Cory a little more than fashion advice.

MARCH 12 • 7:30PM

TALK: Michele Lent Hirsch weaves her own harrowing experiences together with sociological studies and neurological investigations in her new health book, *Invisible*.

MARCH 18 • 7:30PM

BOOK LAUNCH: Celebrate the new paperback edition of *Anything That Burns You*, a biography of the radical poet Lola Ridge by Terese Svoboda.

MARCH 29 • 7:30PM

HISTORY: A hands-on presentation on the history of women's self-defense, featuring Wendy Rouse, author of *Her Own Hero*, and Yuko Uchikawa of Ruckus Safety Awareness.

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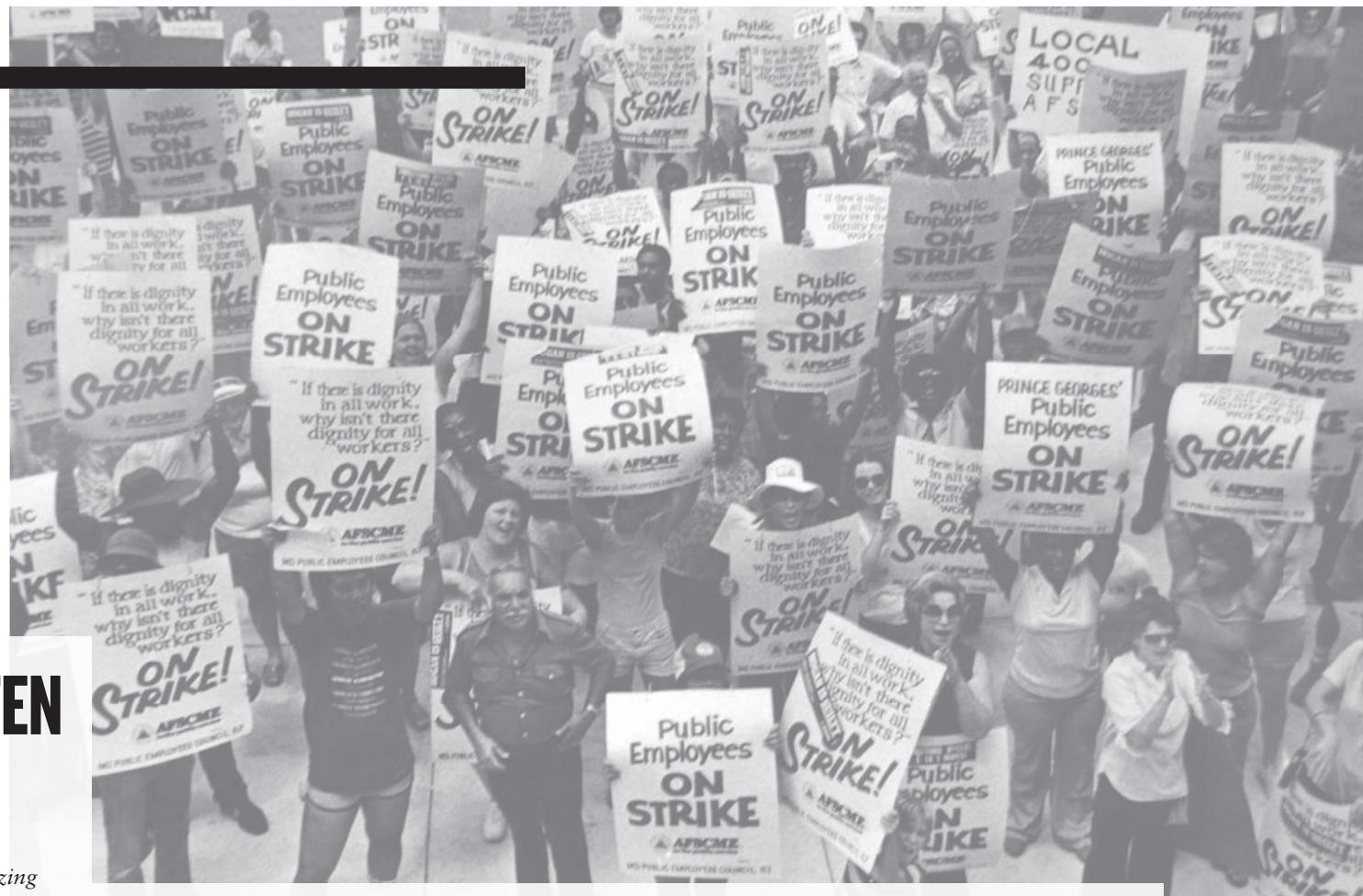
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## LABOR'S FORGOTTEN HISTORY

*Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide*

BY LANE WINDHAM  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS, 2017

By Steven Sherman

A standard version of the history of the Sixties and Seventies emphasizes the eclipse of class struggle by “new social movements” based on racial, gender, or sexual identity, or new demands such as environmentalism or anti-war. In the standard account, the unions were too white, male, bureaucratic and sclerotic to orient themselves to the new movements, and declined under the out-of-touch leadership of AFL-CIO head George Meany before being pushed off the cliff by Reagan when he fired 11,000 striking air traffic controllers and broke their union.

Recently, that narrative has been subject to growing revision. Some writers have emphasized the rank-and-file revolt of the Seventies, which fed off of Sixties anti-authoritarianism. Others have highlighted the surge in public sector union organizing, which moved in tandem with struggles for racial and gender justice. And now Lane Windham’s book, *Knocking on Labor’s Door* arrives, truly upending the old narrative. Far from being irrelevant to the “new” actors in the Seventies, African Americans, women and young people made numerous efforts to organize into unions. Their efforts were often supported by union leaders. They were largely unsuccessful, not because of any fundamental incompatibility between them and the unions, but because they were blindsided by a well organized anti-union offensive whose impact resonates to this day.

U.S. corporations had reasons to be exceptionally anti-union. The United States never passed large scale social democratic legislation, such as a national healthcare plan. However, many workers enjoyed pay and benefits that amounted to a social democratic deal as a result of union contracts. Thus benefits were paid directly by cor-

porations. When profits dropped in the Seventies due to increased international competition, the unions, as the crucial barrier to reducing costs, entered business’ crosshairs.

Business rapidly developed the social and political clout to stop unions in their tracks. In workplaces, they deployed many of the anti-union tactics familiar today — using anti-union consultants and law firms, forcing meetings to intimidate workers during unionization drives, firing and other forms of harassment aimed at active members of the workforce and stonewalling on contract talks if the union won recognition. Skirting the bounds of legality was encouraged. Windham highlights the role of business schools in developing and propounding this new strategy. When unions looked to the Democratic-controlled federal government to reform labor laws and strengthen unions’ hands against the offensive, business was able to block this as well.

### TRAGIC TIMING

The employers’ offensive was all the more tragic because the working class had been transformed by the struggles of the Sixties. African Americans and Latinos were moving from the most marginal jobs to the mainstream as civil rights laws were enforced. The number of women in the workforce was increasing. The anti-authoritarian spirit of the Sixties was carried into the workplace by young workers. African Americans, Latinos, women and young people were all more open to unions than the white men who had long dominated the paid workforce. But an upsurge in union membership, which would have facilitated the entrance of this multiracial working class into the middle class and might have also revitalized the culture of unions, was blocked by the employer offensive.

Windham details four case of the upsurge — three union organizing drives and one new hybrid form of

organization. In all the cases, young, often non-white workers struggled with elan and enthusiasm. However, the outcomes varied.

In a shipyard in Newport News, the ongoing governmental relationship with the shipyard and laws protecting American shipbuilders helped the union. Even so, they had to fight with an unsuccessful strike and an appeal to the National Labor Relations Board (still sympathetic to workers under Carter) before they were able to win a contract.

At Cannon Mills in North Carolina, hopes that a narrow loss in 1974 could be reversed in 1985 were frustrated by the darkening political economic climate. The company effectively stoked fears of international competition and claimed it could work with the Reagan administration to protect American textiles, although this proved untrue. Ultimately the union would win in 1999, only to see the plant close for good three years later.

A union drive in 1979 at Woodies department stores in D.C. was successful, apparently because the company was not yet fully onboard with the anti-union offensive. Right to work laws in Virginia — where some of its stores were located — were used to weaken the union, however. The union helped the workers weather the consolidation storms triggered by competition from discount stores better than workers in non-unionized stores.

The 9to5 organization in Boston, which grew out of the ferment of the women’s movement, took a dual approach. It protested governmental and corporate institutions to pressure for better working conditions, higher wages and improved opportunities, while also trying to unionize predominantly female workplaces. The former strategy proved more effective than the latter and paved the way for numerous “alt-labor” campaigns today.

### SOLIDARITY DAY

In the conclusion to the book, Windham draws attention to Solidarity Day, a march on Washington to pro-

test Reagan’s policies in 1981 called by the AFL-CIO, the largest labor rally in U.S. history. Notably diverse themes — including environmentalism, healthcare, the Equal Rights Amendment and defense of social security — characterized the signs. But unions were unable to stanch the decline in their power, as both strikes and organizing drives receded in number and effectiveness.

The events recounted in *Knocking on Labor’s Door* are crucial to understanding the present, but are little known. For nearly four decades, workers have been unable to mount an offensive. There were plenty of noble exceptions — the 1997 UPS strike, Justice for Janitors, Smithfield, the Chicago Teachers — but none were able to break out of their locale or sector and trigger a more widespread movement or a broad public debate about the status of the working class.

Fight for \$15, using more of the tactics pioneered by 9to5 than conventional strikes or organizing drives, has gone some ways to trigger such a debate. Yet it is hard to see how a Sanders-style New Deal will be turned into law without an upsurge of workers’ struggles. The water has been muddied recently by efforts to pit “identity politics” against “class politics” as if one either supports the struggles of African Americans, women, LGBTQ people, etc or one supports fights for a higher minimum wage and single-payer healthcare. The history recounted here demonstrates that far from being one or the other, “identity politics” struggles energized the working class struggles of the Seventies. If, after the long drought, the working class once again seizes the stage, it is likely to be with a similar dynamic.

## BOOKS

"Brilliant, probing, and disturbing. A gripping story of psychological resilience." —BOB WOODWARD, *The Washington Post*

# Janesville

AN AMERICAN STORY



## GONE

*Janesville: An American Story*

BY AMY GOLDSTEIN  
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 2017

By Jane LaTour

In his poem, "What Work Is," Philip Levine, the great poet of the American working class, wrote about time spent on the "miserable night shift at Cadillac," about waiting on line at Ford's Highland Park plant with "the knowledge that somewhere ahead / a man is waiting who will say, / 'No, we're not hiring today.' That was a poem about Detroit. Now there's a new book by *Washington Post* reporter Amy Goldstein, about another auto-dependent place and what happened after its major employer, General Motors, pulled out — when "we're not hiring today" turned into "we're not hiring ever again," in a once-flush community built around the prosperity that flowed from manufacturing.

Between 2008 and 2009, 8.8 million jobs were lost in the "Great Recession." Goldstein's book, *Janesville: An American Story*, describes the consequences of this loss in Janesville, Wisconsin, a city of 64,000 people in Rock County, southwest of Milwaukee. When the huge GM plant closed, as many as 9,000 people lost their jobs — as we learned in Economics 101, the result of the "multiplier effect," when job losses spin outward in ever-widening spirals. It is the story writ large of the collapse of American manufacturing over the past quarter-century. To read this up-close description of one small city's unraveling is to better understand how Donald Trump's phony populism found enough adherents in Rust Belt states like Wisconsin to deliver him the presidency in 2016.

The story spans five years, from the financial collapse of 2008 to 2013, a year of supposed economic recovery. Goldstein took the time to get to know the people she was writing about. Everything about this book is compelling, from the evocative cover photograph to the crystal-clear, compassionate prose to the cast of characters — people we come to know and care about.

Janesville is the home of Rep. Paul Ryan. Even Ryan, with his excellent connections to politicians and corporate executives was powerless when the good-paying GM jobs were swept away. As a seasoned reporter, Goldstein knows how to tell a story,

and she has great material — the three families at the center of the book and others who add up to a full portrait of this close-knit American community.

We watch as each newly unemployed worker and their families struggle to find a way forward — to survive. Various options are available: Becoming a "Janesville Gypsy," working at distant GM plants and traveling hundreds of miles to get home on the weekends; enrolling in the job retraining center to learn a new skill, with little hope of finding a decent new job; working two to three low-wage jobs without any benefits and having the kids take on jobs too. We watch as poverty increases and high-school students become homeless, as medical clinics reduce their "intake" and people are turned away. As the once strong and proud United Auto Workers local loses its membership, then its leadership, until retired volunteers take over to keep it afloat; as the town tradition of the annual Labor Fest diminishes and then dies.

*Janesville: An American Story* is an ethnography of one of the nation's heartland working-class locales where foreclosures, food banks, clinics and other manifestations of our low-wage economy have struck at the premise of the American Dream. After reading the last page of the epilogue, you'll be hungry for more. The documentation and appendices, including an analysis of the job-retraining programs, add depth and insight into how the author collected her information.

One of the starker divides portrayed is that between the pensioned GM retirees and the newly severed GM workers struggling to keep themselves and their families above water. Goldstein examines the political dynamics of Janesville and shows us just how distant and unsuccessful the policies that emanate from D.C. are — whether initiated by Barack Obama or Donald Trump. Read it, weep — and learn. Then, to paraphrase the words of the great Joe Hill shortly before his death: Don't mourn, organize.

Jane LaTour the author of *Sisters in the Brotherhoods: Working Women Organizing for Equality in New York City*.

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Special thanks to Frameworks Films of Cork, Ireland and the Limerick Council of Trade Unions, producers of *The Limerick Soviet*.

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